



The Taliban's madrassa system in Afghanistan



The threat to global peace and security

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Key messages

The Taliban are using madrassas as sites for the ideological socialisation of both boys and girls in alignment with the regime's strict interpretation of Islamic Law.

The ban on formal education for girls beyond Grade 6 exemplifies the Taliban's pursuit of regressing gender norms to embed the submission of women and girls to men in all aspects of social, economic and political life, a trend that has accelerated over the period of their rule.

The Taliban's madrassa system is leading boys along a dangerous path to engineer their support for the Taliban's ideological vision. This is fostering mistrust within households and social instability.

The implications of the ideological turn to Taliban-instituted madrassa education will pose long-term threats to regional peace and security, both core concerns of the UN Security Council Committee established pursuant to Resolution 1988 (2011), and these developments must be monitored accordingly.



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About this publication

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Cover image: Mullah teaching children Qur'an Sharif Darsi and Nurani Qaida in Kandahar, Afghanistan, April 2025 © Tuzla | Shutterstock

Acronyms and abbreviations

DROPS Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies

PVPV Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (law)

UN United Nations

1 Introduction

In August 2021, the Taliban regained power of Afghanistan through a military takeover, ending the period of the Islamic Republic (2004–2021). Since assuming power, the Taliban de facto authorities (the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) have effectively reversed the Republic's efforts to build a more inclusive and democratic society by specifically targeting the rights of women and girls.

The de facto authorities began to build this system by instituting a series of edicts related to women's and girls' dress, mobility, education and employment (USIP, 2024). Eventually they decided to limit women's and girls' ability to even speak or be heard outside the home (UNAMA, 2025). Among the edicts related to education, the de facto authorities began, in August 2021, with banning co-education and prohibiting men from teaching girls and soon moved to banning girls from secondary (above Grade 6) and university education (USIP, 2024).

The Taliban have pursued a systematic religious transformation of Afghanistan's education infrastructure. In 2022, they declared an intention to establish new madrassas in every district, which has led to the rapid expansion of Taliban-aligned madrassas (religious schools). The Taliban are using these religious institutions as an instrument to advance state objectives, including cementing authority, ideological indoctrination, the cultivation of political loyalty and the augmentation of military capacity (Paglayan, 2025).

This policy brief presents new evidence to argue that the Taliban are using their madrassa system to nurture regressive gender norms as a key component of their extremist ideology. The turn to madrassas will as a result promote social inequality and lead to further instability in Afghan society. These findings may serve to warn global policy-makers of the risk that this turn presents to global peace and security.

Box 1 Research methodology

This policy brief is based on key findings from a longitudinal qualitative study of students in private madrassas, which remain the largest subsector of existing seminaries in the country. The research took place in Kabul from December 2025 to March 2026 by ODI Global and the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS), using digital ethnographic methods. Interviews were held with 14 female students, 7 male students, 7 parents and 7 teachers to discuss the content of madrassa education, students' experiences, parents' perspectives, and the impact on family and community. While the study was limited in scope, the data is unique in that it provides insights based on multiple perspectives of those who experience the impact of madrassa education. Citation details of interview respondents are not provided in the text below to preserve their anonymity and security.

Following an overview of the educational context in Afghanistan (Section 2), the brief draws on the research data to outline how the new madrassa system is deepening social inequality (Section 3) and promoting extremism (Section 4). The conclusion emphasises the emerging security threat (Section 5), followed by recommendations for global policy (Section 6).

2 The rise of madrassa education

Before August 2021, there were approximately 5,000 madrassas officially registered in Afghanistan. Because access to modern schools was difficult, particularly in rural areas, madrassas were viewed as both culturally appropriate and resilient institutions during long periods of conflict (Elkahlout et al., 2026). Access to modern education began to change after 2001, when enrolment rates for girls dramatically increased (UNESCO, 2023).

Box 2 Female education 2001–2021 in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been a remarkable story of progress in education:

- Between 2001 and 2018, student enrolment at all levels of education increased from 1 to 10 million. The number of girls in primary school increased from almost none to 2.5 million.
- Women in higher education increased from 5,000 students to over 100,000 between 2001 and 2021.
- Literacy rates for women doubled from 17% to nearly 30% for all age groups combined between 2001 and 2021.

Source: UNESCO (2023)

Among their first actions, the Taliban closed the mosques and madrassas they deemed to be ideological or security threats, while simultaneously converting pre-2021 public schools into madrassa institutions (Elkahlout et al., 2026). By 2025, over 23,000 new madrassas had been established, with more than 3.65 million enrolled students, all funded through the national budget (HAMRAH Network, 2026). This includes the establishment of jihadi madrassas. There is limited data on these, yet they are the most politically significant category in the Taliban's education structure, presenting the most direct international security concern (see Section 4).

In the past year, the leadership has both emphasised the centrality of religious authority to the country's administration and deepened its expansion of religious institutions. There are reports of more new madrassas inaugurated across the country, 709 male graduates from jihadi madrassas, and increasing numbers of civil servants replaced by those educated in religious institutions aligned with the authorities (General Assembly Security Council, 2026). Officially, the Taliban claim to have established one jihadi madrassa per province. However, Kandahar province alone has documented 23 jihadi madrassas and *dar-ul-ulooms* (seminaries) and a modest estimate of 25,000 students (HAMRAH Network, 2026).

Furthering this transformation of the education system, the de facto authorities launched a large-scale recruitment campaign targeting 100,000 new teachers and administrative staff for private madrassas, a measure designed to ensure these institutions remained aligned with Taliban objectives and did not become sites of organised opposition (ibid.).

2.1 Girls' madrasa education

The transformation of the education system has led to a rapid rise in girls' attendance at the new madrasa institutions, which now offer the only state-sanctioned pathway to education for girls beyond Grade 6 (AFP and Salaam Times, 2023; Ahmadi and Worden, 2023; Hasan, 2023). The World Bank's 2023 *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey* found that 37% of girls aged 13–18 nationally attend 'other forms of schooling', mainly in formal and informal religious institutions (26%) (World Bank, 2023: 19).

Box 3 Afghanistan survey of girls attending madrassas

A DROPS Bishnaw survey of 8,245 women in 34 provinces reported the following:

- Fifty-six (56)% said the most important motivation to send secondary-school age daughters to madrassas was the Taliban ban on girls attending secondary schools.
- Thirty (30)% said that madrassas teach girls about their roles and responsibilities in ways that align with their own beliefs; the remaining respondents were only partially convinced, unsure or disagreed with this assertion.
- The most common behaviour change (38% of madrasa girl students) was now girls wanting to observe full hijab within the home.
- Others observed a desire for girls to marry at a younger age (10%) and be more obedient to men (13%).

Source: Bishnaw, 2024a

The policy to prioritise religious education has lowered attendance in mainstream schools and forced the closure of many. The share of girls aged 13–18 attending secondary school fell from 24% in 2019–2020 to just 3% nationally by 2023, while 12% of girls aged 13–18 still attended primary school in 2023. This likely reflects a substitution effect, whereby older girls are attending primary school in response to the secondary-school ban (World Bank, 2023: 18–19).

Alongside the complete exclusion of girls from post-primary education, in tertiary education, female enrolment declined from 27% in 2019 to zero by 2024, while male enrolment decreased by 40%. The number of female lecturers has also been reduced by 70% (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2025). Curriculum changes eliminated hundreds of books and 18 subjects, including human rights, gender equality and political science, raising concerns about academic freedom and relevance (ibid.).

3 Deepening gender inequality

The Taliban's new regulations, particularly the ban on education and employment opportunities for girls and women, have led to a worrying regression in gender norms. The new madrassas contribute to this trend, creating a system that entrenches social norms that deepen the subordination of women and girls. This propagation of deeply conservative gender norms is a dramatic state-led reversal from social trends initiated during the Republic period, which was marked by the expansion of social, political and economic opportunities for girls and women (Nehan, 2022; UN Women, 2024). Today, families and communities are beginning to adopt Taliban-aligned attitudes to exclude women and girls from public life and discriminate against them in everyday practices (UN Women, 2023). Evidence has emerged of a new push to marry girls underage due to a lack of other life options for them (Safi et al., 2024), reinforced by a decree in May 2026 upholding underage marriages and making it almost impossible for girls to challenge these unions (Amnesty International, 2026).

The data gathered for this research (see Box 1) identifies several key objectives of madrassa education aimed to engineer the regressive reversal of gender norms. The values and norms taught to students in madrassas deepen patriarchy as both a family and social system in which men (especially older men) exercise power over others (Plan International, no date). The following subsections outline teachings that are used to subordinate women and girls.

3.1 Confining women and girls to the domestic sphere

Madrassa education emphasises that a woman's primary role is within the home, with her domestic responsibilities superseding any other form of professional contribution in society. 'Household management' as a topic is taught to girls, focusing on child-rearing and family life and encouraging them 'to stay at home', as teachers and girl students revealed in their interviews.

Parents observe that their daughters have narrowed their interests to focus almost exclusively on discussing religious lessons while at home. The teaching emphasises restrictions, especially for teenage girls, and has led to a change in 'mindset', as both teachers and girl students report. UN Women notes this teaching focus reinforces other directives that deny women and girls access to employment and further education, restrict their mobility outside the home, and facilitate early marriage (UN Women, 2024).

3.2 Enforcing modesty, hijab and segregation

Girls who attend madrassas report the normalisation of extreme covering, abandoning the practices they learned in regular schools. They have become 'accustomed' to strict rules, noting that their headscarves are now 'even more noticeable' and that they are required to wear gloves and cover themselves completely, according to some girl students interviewed.

Students acknowledge that these changes do not happen overnight but occur gradually as the madrassa environment and societal rules slowly influence their behaviour and appearance. Both boys and girls say they are explicitly taught what is *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden) regarding clothing. The normalisation of such clothing decrees reinforces other edicts that entrench the subordination of girls to male authority. These findings deepen the insights from Bishnaw's (2024a) survey that madrassa education reinforces harmful gender norms (see Box 3).

3.3 Deepening male control within the home

Boys say the religious teachings should be applied 'in raising children and dealing with wives', as one student said. Girls, in turn, are encouraged to marry early, either at puberty or by age 16, and according to the wishes of their family. They revealed they are taught to obey their husband's commands, while some receive more nuanced guidance that they should obey commands that do not contradict religious teachings. Other research similarly documents how female madrassa students are taught that men are permitted four wives, that women should accept their husbands' remarriage, and that they should accept early marriage, particularly to fighters and those involved in jihad. Their brothers, emboldened by the religious authority granted by the madrassa education, have begun policing their sisters' clothing and conduct and pressuring them to marry early (HAMRAH Network, 2026).

The recent decree that equates silence with consent in underage marriage renders it almost impossible for a girl to leave such a union, while not subjecting men to the same requirements if they choose to do so. This reveals the intention of such teaching to deepen girls' subordination (Amnesty International, 2026).

3.4 Encouraging boys to view their futures with a sense of growing opportunity

Boys are encouraged to aspire to employment (economic power) and influence (social and political power), while girls are encouraged to anticipate little future influence outside of the reduced social power they will enjoy within the home. As one male student claimed, 'Madrassa students usually encourage others to go anywhere knowledge is taught and to continue their studies'. The pursuit of further knowledge is encouraged by the Qur'an and welcomed by all students. This is now denied to girls, whose pathways to further education and employment are blocked while their brothers enjoy greater opportunities. Many girls interviewed report that they now focus more on the afterlife as they consider their prospects. This could indicate increased religiosity because of their education, a sense of limited future pathways in society and, in some cases, declining mental health.

As the study data suggests, the teaching of regressive gender norms in the Taliban's madrassas is contributing to an increasingly unequal society. These findings confirm concerns raised by other

researchers. Madrassa teachings emphasise obedience, modesty and religious obligations over broader educational subjects. Boys are reported to have broader access to modern sciences and non-religious subjects, while girls are restricted to religious curricula (Bishnaw, 2024a; Elkahout et al., 2026). Such indoctrination confirms that the madrassa education system is being used to promote submissiveness, limits aspirations, and actively suppresses students' agency and freedom by reinforcing compliance with narrow ideological interpretations of Islam (Mirbacha, 2025).

The Taliban's larger vision is a large-scale social engineering of Afghan society based on the promotion of their extremist views, as discussed in the next section.

4 Social engineering to promote extremism

Contrary to a prevailing assumption in the scholarly literature that authoritarian regimes suppress mass education, as a primary mechanism of social control and resistance management, recent empirical research reveals a more counterintuitive pattern. Authoritarian regimes have, in fact, invested heavily in the provision of mass education, deploying it as an instrument to advance state objectives, including ideological indoctrination, the cultivation of political loyalty and the augmentation of military capacity (Paglayan, 2025).

Afghanistan under the Taliban clearly illustrates this dynamic, though with a distinctive asymmetry: girls are barred from mainstream schooling beyond Grade 6, while boys' education is permitted to continue. Crucially, however, both tracks are being progressively subordinated to the nationwide expansion of madrassa-based education. This policy configuration is not just a violation of women's and girls' right to education: it represents the active and deliberate reconstruction of the fabric of society by making the madrassa system the only pathway to education. This gives the Taliban significant power to use madrassas as a foundation for advancing and enforcing their gender-oppressive decrees, policies and laws. The following subsections outline key elements of this strategy, also highlighting (in Section 4.4) existing resistance to indoctrination.

4.1 Religious extremism as national ideology

The Taliban are systematically crafting society and polity around their ideology. This a hybrid of Deobandi-Wahhabi theology and political Islamism forged in its experience of jihad, leading to gender policies that have been rhetorically condemned by other Muslim states (Amini, 2025). Within the country, the Taliban retain considerable moral authority among their rank-and-file members and supporters, from their success in capturing the state by defeating 'imperial' powers to their second jihad (Weigand, 2022). For the ordinary Afghan, the structural failures that precipitated the Taliban's return to power – such as the normative shortcomings of international state-building, and the compounding institutional dysfunctions that rendered the Afghan Government increasingly illegitimate – are largely abstract. What is remembered, and carries weight, is a far simpler narrative: democracy failed and the Taliban's jihad succeeded.

That perceived success confers upon the Taliban a form of sacred legitimacy, a moral authority rooted in the Islamic concept of *nusra* (divine favour), that is exceptionally difficult for locals to contest or displace. Rooted within this is the Taliban's narrative of women's rights as an extension of imperialism (Mohamad Ashrof, 2026). Thus, their edicts have sought to reverse the gains in women's rights during the Republic period. One of the most extreme examples is in the impact of the 2024 Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) law, mandating extreme restrictions on clothing, women's mobility and public presence, and permissible interactions

between men and women (Safi and Khan, 2024). A survey of 7,223 women, found that 48.89% now wear the full hijab, including the niqab (face-covering), when leaving the home. Almost 20% said they do not leave the home without a *mahram* (a male relative) (Bishnaw, 2024b).

To bolster their legitimacy, authoritarian regimes use indoctrination to spread and strengthen the image of stability. One of the key ways regimes do this is through instilling moral principles of obedience through education (Paglayan, 2025); in Afghanistan, madrassas are a key point of entry. Reshaping the education system (as seen in the Taliban's closure of other types of educational institutions, as discussed in Section 2) further helps to contain potential political rivalries and prevent the mobilisation of opposition.

The Taliban intend for the public education system to become subordinate to the madrassa system (UNESCO, 2023). First, the public education system has slowly changed to reflect the predominance of religious subjects. As a male teacher said, 'Now the difference between madrassa and public schools is only in the name'. Combined with an economic crisis, the replacement of modern public education with madrassa education creates a risk of radicalisation which acts as a destabilising factor in Afghanistan and the region (Human Rights Council, 2025).

Our research respondents expressed concerns about increasingly centralised oversight of madrassas, growing interference in the management and curriculum of private madrassas, and the introduction of jihadi teachings in public madrassas. The Ministry of Education conducts regular monitoring visits to ensure madrassas adhere to the prescribed curriculum. Female students report that Taliban representatives conduct weekly visits to their madrassas under the framework of *tabligh*, a term denoting organised Islamic proselytisation and moral instruction campaigns. Further, personnel from the department to enforce the PVPV law visit all educational institutions, including madrassas, to enforce the decrees, often inconsistently and harshly (UNAMA, 2025).

During weekly Taliban *tabligh* sessions, students interviewed say they are taught *seerah* (the biography of the Prophet Muhammad), *Surah al-noor*, the Qur'anic chapter that contains the most explicit injunctions on female modesty, gender segregation and the regulation of sexual conduct, as well as *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the Islamic discipline of spiritual self-purification and the subordination of individual will to divine command. Students are instructed on divine punishment for non-compliance with obligatory prayers. Because Taliban authorities deliver this information directly, it suggests they either distrust existing educators to convey these teachings with sufficient ideological fidelity or considers the content too politically sensitive to leave to pedagogical discretion. This demonstrates how important the Taliban consider education to be in building a social order that aligns with their vision as a polity.

4.2 Fostering mistrust within communities

Madrassas teach boys that loyalty to the Emirate supersedes family bonds, encouraging them to report on their own households. This led some parents to withdraw sons from madrassas, out of fear they had become informants (HAMRAH Network, 2026). Students and teachers from

local madrassas are supporting efforts to enforce the PVPV law (UNAMA, 2025). Among the respondents of the Bishnaw survey (see Box 3), 33.8% of women said that local mosques give instructions to male community members on how to implement the PVPV law (Bishnaw, 2024b).

Research respondents described increasing Taliban interference. One male teacher explained:

‘Every day we are told exactly which subject to teach. There is heavy interference. For example, curricula from the Republic era are rejected, and we must only teach the curriculum they have created.’

Interference comes from the madrassa administration and higher authorities. Even during lessons, officials from the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue come and give instructions, according to one male teacher interviewed at a private madrassa in Kabul.

Coercive dynamics have also been documented at the community level, with reports of religious and community leaders pressuring families to enrol their daughters in madrassas and even withholding humanitarian aid and food assistance unless they do so (Bishnaw, 2024a; Ibrahim and Habibyar, 2025).

4.3 Creating submissive subjects

Crucially, the regression of gender norms (as discussed in Section 3) and the systemic dismantling of mainstream education are directly linked to the consolidation of ideological control. Scholars argue that depriving women and girls of public education is a strategy to shape them into their own ‘definition of womanhood’ (Mirbacha, 2024), creating not only submissive constituents but inroads for them to re-engineer the private sphere as a microcosm of their vision of governance. The curriculum in madrassas conditions girls for a prescribed role within the Taliban’s patriarchal religious order, while boys are educated within a framework that normalises gender hierarchy.

Boys attending madrassas increasingly see themselves in a value-driven leadership role in their communities because they can provide religious guidance to family and friends. However, this guidance is highly normative and deeply gendered; for boys, it often means offering advice on ‘how sisters should dress’, along with guiding friends ‘toward the right path’, said one male student. Another boy described:

‘When we go to school and learn the Qur’an and its interpretation, we should put it into practice and offer it to the community and tell others to do so. The community tends to be unfortunate when people do not act sincerely, but if they [do], things will go well.’

Male students are confident that madrassas correctly teach students ‘how to behave in society’, placing them at an advantage in comparison to mainstream schools, which have declined in quality.

Boys' heightened power within their families and communities, based on their religious education, sets the stage for them to wield ideologically infused political power within society in the years to come. Consultations led by United Nations (UN) agencies in Afghanistan report that misogynistic social attitudes are becoming more severe, influencing the values of male family members and encouraging community members to enforce Taliban policies, including by harassing women (UN Women, 2024). Of the women consulted, 96% reported that 'most people cannot be trusted', including neighbours, due to heightened security concerns and fear that anyone could be a Taliban informant (ibid.).

4.4 Silencing dissent

Several students, including boys, disagreed with the rhetoric taught at their madrassas about the expectation that girls should be submissive and isolated. Others argued that the educational restrictions on women are 'human-made' and not grounded in religious teachings, and that these and other Taliban restrictions do not align with historical Islamic practices. Some teachers reported similar divergent perspectives from the norms that are promoted in their madrassas, saying that Islam does give women the right to study, work and trade, referring to the Prophet Muhammad's well-known respect for women. These concerns were shared by some parents interviewed, but they knew it was not in their power to influence the content of the education their children receive.

While a clear undercurrent of theological resistance persists within some private madrassas, especially those led by women, the political power the Taliban de facto authorities wield through exploitation of faith-based education has rendered it impossible to engage in debate or discussion about the content of madrassa education. As an example of this, respondents agreed to be interviewed for this research only under conditions of strict anonymity, and some initial participants dropped out of the study due to fears that the authorities would punish them for speaking about their madrassa experiences.

Students and families are navigating the madrassa system pragmatically, treating it as the only available venue for continued education, rather than as a site of genuine ideological conversion, and they are framing compliance in terms of moral dignity rather than radicalisation. This disjunction between enforced outward conformity and internal intellectual resistance suggests that the Taliban's strategy of societal re-engineering through education is generating latent tensions rather than durable legitimacy.

5 Conclusion: an emerging security risk

The new madrassa system established by the Taliban represents an educational environment shaped by their ideological agenda, with a discernible trajectory towards the normalisation of regressive gender norms in service of expanding an extremist nationalist ideology. The gender norms promote a complete exclusion of women and girls from public and political life and their subordination within the home and community to male authority. The Taliban have empowered family members to report on women and girls to the authorities, fostering stress and mistrust in the private and public spheres. Their social engineering process is based on promoting religious extremism as national ideology, fostering mistrust within communities, creating submissive subjects and silencing dissent.

The Taliban's ideology is extreme because it deploys religious teachings to further their interpretation of Sharia and jihad is central to the political agenda to legitimise the de facto government of the Islamic Emirate. The ideology advances an exclusionary form of Sunni Islamist rule and enforces the coercive regulation of both public and private life, including severe gender discrimination, the suppression of political dissent, and the enforcement of prescribed religious and social conduct.

As noted by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team to the UN Security Council, domestic stability under the Taliban often comes at the expense of severe human rights abuses and internal repression, with women and girls losing out significantly (UN Security Council, 2025). While the current evidence does not establish a direct pipeline from standard (public and private, non-jihadi) madrassa graduation to military recruitment, the ideological indoctrination at scale, which relies on this repression, constitutes a durable and compounding security risk. It is structurally consistent with the Taliban's ongoing provision of safe haven to international and regional terrorist organisations (General Assembly Security Council, 2026). This will exacerbate internal instability and holds great potential to pose long-term threats to regional peace and security.

Increasingly, experts are drawing attention to the expansion of the madrassa system as a fundamental security and stability concern. Several sources report Taliban-aligned political programming and jihadi teachings alongside religious instruction, even in standard madrassas (Balkhi, 2025; HAMRAH Network, 2026). The 'Talibanisation' of educational content risks producing a generation of youth susceptible to extremist ideology (Balkhi, 2025). The risk does not arise from religious education itself, nor does it apply to all madrassas or youth; rather, it arises from the way in which this education privileges the Taliban's political worldview, as outlined in this brief, and it is reinforced through coercive discipline and limited exposure to alternative content. In such an environment, interrelated factors such as poverty, insecurity, trauma and limited opportunities can create conditions that can make some young people more receptive to exclusionary or violent political narratives.

The security implications that can rise from such an environment would not be easily contained within Afghanistan but may extend well beyond its borders. For instance, the cross-border madrassa network linking the Taliban to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan – which shares the Deobandi doctrine, Pashtun identity and institutional ties with the Afghan system – is already fuelling regional instability, with Pakistan engaged in open conflict, and Afghanistan engaged in cross-border skirmishes involving Tajikistan, Iran and Uzbekistan (General Assembly Security Council, 2025, 2026; Human Rights Council, 2025).

6 Recommendations for global policy

There is a clear link between the Taliban's turn to a madrassa education system and the creation of conditions for threats to global security. The education system and the architecture stripping women and girls of their rights are co-constituted. This cannot be normalised, therefore international stakeholders must take the following actions:

Recognise the Taliban's madrassa system as a security concern

The UN and international stakeholders should recognise that the Taliban's restrictions on women and ideological reshaping of education fuel long-term instability. Taliban-aligned madrassas that promote violent, exclusionary and anti-democratic narratives hold immense potential to increase vulnerability to extremist recruitment, particularly amid growing poverty, unemployment and limited educational alternatives.

Reframe exclusionary education policy as a security threat

The UN, European Union (EU), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and Gulf Cooperation Council should strengthen their analytical frameworks to assess the Taliban's systematic restructuring of Afghanistan's education system – including the large-scale conversion of public schools into madrassas, the imposition of extremist curricula and the institutionalised ban on girls' education – as a factor undermining peace, stability and security in Afghanistan, consistent with the concerns reflected in UN Security Council Resolution 1988 (2011).

Sanction individuals responsible for militarising education

The United Nations Security Council must take clear steps to counter the Taliban's ideological use of madrassa education, which is a threat to national and global security; and it is thereby encouraged to leverage its powers under the 1988 Sanctions Committee to institute targeted sanctions against the key Taliban officials responsible. This should include the de facto Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, Mohammad Khalid Hanafi, and the Minister of Higher Education, Nida Mohammad Nadeem.

Mandate gender-specific reporting as a security indicator

Include the Taliban's record on gender as a security indicator to monitor it accurately.

- The UN Security Council should clarify that the reporting mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Sanctions Committee includes assessment of the Taliban's gender-based education policies as indicators relevant to Afghanistan's stability and security.

Include madrassa education as an indicator of stability and security

- The UN and relevant stakeholders should include madrassa education as an indicator in assessments of Afghanistan's stability, given its implications for social cohesion, gender equality and ideological radicalisation.
- The UN should monitor the implementation of the Taliban's madrassa system through quarterly human rights and Secretary-General's reports. At the next review of the 1988 sanctions regime, Member States should deepen the UN's mandate to require regular reporting on the growth, curriculum, and security implications of the Taliban's madrassa system.
- Member States should consult a diverse range of Afghan civil society organisations, education experts and community actors to document the growth, geographic reach, curriculum and effects of the Taliban's madrassa system. They should insist that the 1988 Sanctions Committee and its Monitoring Team provide detailed, regular and evidence-based reporting on these trends, and submit relevant findings for inclusion in the Committee's periodic reviews.

Engage regional powers on the security implications of madrassa expansion

The UN and relevant stakeholders should actively engage neighbouring states and regional bodies, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, on the long-term security implications of this ideological formation at scale. Regional states with significant Afghan refugee and diaspora populations are particularly exposed to the downstream effects of this radicalisation pipeline and should be included in the Committee's consultative processes.

Support and protect alternative education channels and resistance

The international community, including UN agencies and bilateral donors, should urgently scale up support for alternative education pathways for Afghan girls and women, including community-based learning, digital and distance education, and cross-border educational access in neighbouring countries. Critically, the qualitative evidence gathered by ODI Global and DROPS indicates that a significant number of madrassa teachers are themselves using Islamic theological frameworks to resist the Taliban's gender doctrine and to affirm women's rights. These educators represent a vital and underused civil society resource; international actors should develop discreet mechanisms to support and protect them, develop flexible funding mechanisms, and amplify their work.

Premise the international recognition of the Taliban de facto authorities on the reversal of their gender persecution policy

Link formal international recognition to the reversal of all decrees, policies and laws stripping women and girls of their fundamental rights. Systematic gender persecution causes measurable drivers of social fragmentation, internal instability and the erosion of the human capital base necessary for any viable post-conflict political order.

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